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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHMS #0512/01 1411259  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 211259Z MAY 07  
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8276  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0489  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0381  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000512

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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/PPD, NEA/PI, AND INR/R/MR  
STATE PASS USTR FOR N. MOORJANI, J. BUNTIN  
LONDON FOR TSOU  
PARIS FOR ZEYA  
USCENTCOM FOR PLUSH  
FOREIGN PRESS CENTER FOR SILAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRANIAN-OMANI RELATIONS, AMBASSADOR  
SOUTHERN OMAN TRIP, IRI PRESIDENT IN MUSCAT, PALESTINIAN INFIGHTING

¶1. SUMMARY: Iranian President's visit to Muscat garners heavy local media coverage; Ambassador Grappo's op-ed on trafficking published in two local dailies; Ambassador Grappo visit to Dhofar University; president of International Republican Institute visit to Muscat. State-run "Oman" newspaper says Israel is "happy" at Palestinian infighting; accuses some international and regional "parties" of opposing Israeli-Arab peace for their own interests; confirms the Sultanate's support for a "peaceful" Iranian nuclear program. END SUMMARY.

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COVERAGE  
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¶2. On Tuesday, May 15 and Wednesday, May 16, all dailies gave front-page coverage, with large color photos, to Iranian president Ahmedinejad's two-day visit to Muscat. Headlines hailed the "deep-rooted" and "historic" ties between the two nations, and carried Ahmedinejad's claim that Iran's nuclear program is "no security risk." Articles and pictures featured his meetings with Oman's leaders, including the Sultanate's highest Ibadhi religious authority Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmed al Khalili. The editors-in-chief of government-owned, Arabic-language "Oman" (circulation 38,000) and privately owned, youth-oriented "Al-Shabiba" (circulation 20,000) interviewed Ahmedinejad, the first time that Omani authorities have permitted the local press to interview a head-of-state.

¶3. Two local dailies published Ambassador Grappo's op-ed on human trafficking: "Al-Shabiba" on Wednesday, May 16, and English-language "Times of Oman" (circulation 25,000) on Thursday, May 17.

¶4. On Sunday, May 20, all dailies carried photos and brief text about the visit of Mr. Lorne Craner, president of the International Republican Institute, with the heads of Oman's legislative bodies: Dr. Yahya bin Mahfoudh al Mantheri, Chairman of the Majlis al-Dawla, and Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali al Qatabi, Chariman of the Majlis al-Shura. Most articles ran just inside the front page.

¶5. On Sunday, May 20 and Monday, May 21, "Al-Shabiba" carried a brief statement about Ambassador Grappo's visit to Dhofar University in southern Oman. On May 21, "Oman" also carried a brief article on the Ambassador's university visit. The May 21 pieces included a picture of the Ambassador, Mrs. Grappo, and PAO.

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IRANIAN PRESIDENT SPEAKS TO LOCAL PRESS  
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¶6. Government-owned, English-language "Observer" (circulation 20,000, sister publication to "Oman" newspaper) published Ahmedinejad's statement that the solution to controversy over Iran's nuclear activities was to "stick to law and justice. The law should be applied to all, equally and fairly." He added that "some powers want to terrorize and intimidate other peoples and government [sic] to deter them from setting up nuclear plants so that nuclear energy is monopolized by these powers." Ahmedinejad said that Iran would dialogue with the U.S. "with a view to supporting the Iraqi people and preserving its unity, its security, and its territorial integrity." He also repeated previous calls for "international forces" to leave the Gulf since in his view the superpower era was over, and the presence of outside forces would harm the region's peoples just as this has harmed Iraqis.

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BLOCK QUOTES: ISRAEL "HAPPY" AT INFIGHTING  
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¶7. "Oman" published a May 19 article entitled "Israel's Hidden Hand and the Worsening Situation."

"Nothing makes Israel happier than to see a Palestinian killing his brother or destroying Palestinian infrastructure and institutions. This is exactly what Israel is looking for even if it has had to recruit Palestinian agents to destroy everything. This shows the amount of hatred [Israelis] have toward the Palestinians. This sad environment leads only to more separation between Palestinians and consequently brings more suffering to their women and children."

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SOME "PARTIES" OPPOSE PEACE FOR THEIR INTERESTS  
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¶8. On May 20, state-owned daily "Oman" published an editorial entitled "Continuous Trials to Weaken the Arabs":

"The last Arab Summit in Riyadh acknowledged the Arab peace initiative and pushed to activate it through a follow-up committee. But it seemed that some international and regional parties were not willing to solve the pending issues such as the Palestinian conflict...These parties know that ending Arab-Israeli conflict in the region will not fulfill their future interests. Thus they try to use all possible obstacles to challenge the peace process in the region. However, everybody knows that the only people who are going to suffer from the actions of some parties who run away from peace initiatives to fulfill their own interests are the people of conflicting countries. They are the ones who will pay the price. Thus, we need to prioritize stability and security in order to maintain a decent life for the people."

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SULTANATE FAVORS IRAN'S "PEACEFUL" NUKE PROGRAM  
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¶9. "Oman" also wrote on May 21 about the visit of the Iranian president to Oman under the headline "Wide Horizons to Consolidate Omani-Iranian Relations":

"Today the Sultanate is opening its arms to welcome the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, at a time when many in both countries are looking forward to the exchange of opinions...the Sultanate has ensured its support for Iran's right to possess peaceful nuclear technology...this is likely to some extent to build trust and deepen the bridges of communication between the parties concerned, and overcome conflicting views about nuclear power, especially between Iran and the Arab countries that support emptying the region from any weapons of mass destruction and policies of double standards."

FONTENEAU